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SUBJECT: ISAIAS VISITS IRAN; GARNERS ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS

Classified By: CDA JENNIFER A. MCINTYRE FOR REASON 1.4(D).

¶1. (SBU) President Isaias Afwerki's May 19-20 state visit to Tehran and meetings with Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have received front page coverage in the Eritrean government-controlled media. President Isaias' visit included an interview with Iran's Press TV, the full text of which was published in the May 21 edition of the "Eritrean Profile." Although the Eritrean press reported that the two leaders "share common views on a number of issues," Isaias largely dodged questions of interest to the Iranians in the Press TV interview, such as Eritrea's views on "the Palestinian question," its ties with Israel, its definition of "terrorism," and position on Iran's nuclear program. Consistent with past public statements, President Isaias voiced general support for Iran's right to own and use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Isaias used the Press TV interview to also air his anti-U.S. sentiments (even when not part of the question); for example, the President began his lengthy, meandering response to a question about Eritrea's position towards Palestine and relationship with Israel with the statement, "It is very normal to have diplomatic relationships, even with the United States." Nowhere in the response did he ever refer to Palestine.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: President Isaias' visit follows a May 5 visit by Eritrea's Foreign and Finance Ministers to Tehran, and is consistent with the regime's efforts over several years to expand its relations with, and gain financial and political support from, nations outside of the U.S./European sphere (including those publicly antagonistic to U.S. policies, such as Iran, Syria, Cuba and Venezuela). Post believes the purpose of Isaias' trip was likely two-fold: garner Iranian financial assistance to bolster Eritrea's failing economy; and generate political support for its position on demarcation of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. Although the Iranian and Eritrean Presidents greatest "shared commonality" seems to be their anti-U.S. stance, Isaias' trip reportedly yielded concrete results. According to the government's official website, [www.shabait.com](http://www.shabait.com), the visit culminated in the Presidents signing four (unspecified) documents focused on areas of "trade and investment." END COMMENT.  
MCINTYRE